

MEDIA RELEASE

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Rappahannock will flow freely after 151 years

Senator John Warner to push 'start button' on Embrey Dam breaching

Explosives set by the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force Reserves will blast a 100-foot hole in the middle of Embrey Dam, allowing the Rappahannock River to flow freely for the first time in more than 150 years. Senator John Warner will give the order to commence the detonation at a ceremony today at noon, marking the first step in a plan by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to completely remove the dam.

The detonation on Feb. 23 will be just the "beginning of the end" for the Embrey Dam. The penetration will open several holes in the dam to create fish passages and to drain pooled water from behind the dam. Low placement of demolition is necessary for safety reasons, and may leave portions of the upper slab, top cap, and supporting piers intact.

The dam breach will immediately allow fish migration and reduce the chance for flash flooding. However, canoers and kayakers will have to wait to traverse that part of the river until the area has been cleared of enough debris to allow safe, free passage.

The Corps of Engineers estimates that the dam will be completely dismantled in 2006.

"I have looked forward to this moment for some time, and am proud to play a small part in this historic event," said Sen. Warner (R - VA). "As a result of today's event, fish will be able to swim unhindered from the Chesapeake to the Blue Ridge, and generations that follow us will be better able to enjoy all that the Rappahannock has to offer."

Fredericksburg Mayor Bill Beck acknowledged the Senator's role in driving this initiative forward.

"With the tremendous support from Sen. John Warner, and after long years of planning and coordination, the time has finally arrived to open the Rappahannock," said Mayor Beck.

The 22-foot-high, 770-foot Embrey Dam, last used for hydroelectric power generation in the 1960s, hasn't supplied water to the City of Fredericksburg canal since 1999. Because of the lack of usefulness, federal, state and local officials have worked with environmental and conservation groups to remove the dam, and reopen the Rappahannock River. Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Tayloe Murphy, a long-

time supporter of the Chesapeake Bay, noted that the numerous partners in the project make the breaching of Embrey Dam somewhat unique.

“Commitment and cooperation have been the hallmarks of this effort. We have biologists with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries who have practically made this river and restoring these fish populations their life’s work. To join resources with these other dedicated federal and local officials--preservation and conservation groups, all working towards the goal of opening these waters--is tremendous. This project is an excellent example of the partnerships that will be necessary to achieve our other Bay Program goals, especially those involving water quality improvements,” said Murphy.

Removing the dam will allow migrating fish, most significantly the American shad, to return to their historic spawning waters upriver for the first time since 1853. In addition, it is anticipated that once the debris from the dam is completely removed, the resulting water flows will attract kayakers and canoes to run the river.

"The removal of Embrey Dam is the 123rd successful fish passage project for Bay Program partners," said Chesapeake Bay Program Director Rebecca Hanmer. "By reopening more than 1,300 river miles to migratory fish in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, we are allowing American shad and river herring to reclaim their native waters as part of our concerted effort to restore the life of the Bay."

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams called the removal of Embrey Dam, “one of the most significant fish passage efforts in recent memory.”

Under the leadership of Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Robert B. Flowers, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has reaffirmed its commitment to the environment by formalizing a set of "Environmental Operating Principles" applicable to all its decision-making and programs. Included in these principles is a call to seek balance and synergy between human development activities and natural systems.

"The Corps is well known as a builder of dams,” said the Honorable John Paul Woodley, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. “But the removal of Embrey Dam not only spotlights our increasingly important environmental restoration mission but gives the 'citizen soldiers' of the Corps a chance to support its military customers by providing a real-world training exercise to the men and women of our armed forces. It's great to see the Corps carrying out such restoration in my home Commonwealth as we continue to strengthen relationships with our federal and state partners."

Demolition experts and dive teams from the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force Reserves are using the breaching of Embrey Dam as a real-world, joint training exercise.

"We are proud to be able to support the Corps of Engineers on a project like this," said Capt. Clayton Lull, commander of the U.S. Army Dive Company at Fort Eustis. "This provides us with not only a great training opportunity, but also gives us a chance to make

a positive impact on the environment for the city of Fredericksburg and the Commonwealth of Virginia."

"The Embrey Dam project provides an excellent opportunity for our U.S. Air Force Reserves to participate in a joint training exercise as part of the Innovative Readiness Program," said Lt. Jennifer Eschbaugh, chief of Innovative Readiness Training, Air Force Reserve Command Headquarters. "It's Air Force Reserves and Army forces working together for the good of an American community."

"Removal of the Embrey Dam demonstrates Fredericksburg's deep commitment to our environment and the realization that the Rappahannock's greatest value is as it was created," said Mayor Beck. "Removal of the Embrey Dam signals a new phase in the life of the Rappahannock River."

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